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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to describe the sociolinguistic situation of a small group of bilingual Chicano adolescents residing in a California border town. This report is the first stage in a research project into the social dimensions of language use within the Chicano speech community, and the first phase of a cumulative research strategy in Chicano sociolinguistics. The central concern of the report is to examine the association between the reported language use of these adolescents for given social situations and their language dominance. A total of 75 students, 33 males and 42 females, in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades participated in the study. The relationship between linguistic proficiency and language use was investigated by means of the Bilingual Syntax Measure II, and language usage was investigated by means of a sociolinguistic questionnaire. Maintenance of and loyalty to the Spanish language were found to be very high for the subjects. Specifically, results show that: (1) linguistic dominance and language use are closely associated; (2) there is a high level of Spanish language use in the family; and (3) there is widespread use of Spanish language mass media. (CLK)

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The Sociolinguistic Situation of Bilingual Chicano Adolescents In A California Border Town

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The Sociolinguistic Situation of Bilingual Chicano Adolescents In A California Border Town

1.0 Introduction

Despite the large number of speakers in the Chicano speech community, estimated to be around 6.5 million speakers, which clearly makes them the largest linguistic minority in North America, they have attracted very little sociolinguistic attention. Little is known about the varieties of language used by Chicanos, the patterns of language use, attitudes toward particular varieties, the extent of language loyalty or maintenance, or for that matter, any other aspect of language within the group. This is true even though their principal language is Spanish which, in other areas, has a long history of scholarly interest[1].

The relatively few studies that have been carried out, though useful enough, are largely descriptions of local dialects which base their analyses on the deviations from standard, written Spanish. The vast majority have been done by white researchers many of whom have the barest knowledge of the communities in which they work, and even less of an interest in contributing to their betterment. An indication of the state of affairs in Chicano linguistics is that by far the most comprehensive work in this area was accomplished nearly sixty years ago by Aurelio Espinosa's studies on New Mexican Spanish[2].

It is usually assumed that most Chicanos are bilingual, approaching native speaker ability in English only seldom, and in varying degrees, and

using a variety or varieties of Mexican Spanish as the language of the home. The persistence of Spanish within the Chicano speech community is usually said to reflect the degree of isolation of large segments of the group from interaction with the larger society; the close proximity of Mexico, and the close relations with relatives in Mexico many Chicanos maintain; the relative recency of mass migrations, thereby providing a continuous arrival of newcomers from Mexico to this country; and family pressure to retain the "old" ways of Mexico. In brief, the sociolinguistic situation of the Chicano speech community, as discussed in the literature, may be summarized as follows:[3]

1. Urban Chicano households tend to use less Spanish than rural Chicano households.

2. There is a tendency for Chicanos living in predominantly Chicano neighborhoods to speak inadequate English, while Chicanos living in mixed neighborhoods exhibit less of a language handicap in English.

3. Spanish language radio is more popular than Spanish language television; and Spanish language media, in general, are most popular among the poor, women, and old people.

4. An inverse relationship between the socioeconomic status of the family and use of Spanish is usually postulated.

There are thus cogent and powerful reasons to encourage sociolinguistic study of the Chicano speech community. Seen purely from an academic perspective, sociolinguistic investigation in the Chicano speech community makes excellent sense: it is a large group that resides in all areas of the country, the basic varieties of language use are easily accessible to researchers, it shares many social characteristics with other groups, and

little has been done (Aguirre, 1977b). The lack of commitment between researcher and community in previous studies, and the lack of relatedness between studies, has not produced any serious sociolinguistic research commitment to the Chicano speech community.

This report then is neither an attempt to provide the conceptual framework for a Chicano sociolinguistics, nor is it a survey of the field in general. It has a much more limited goal: to present findings which describe the sociolinguistic situation of a small group of bilingual Chicano adolescents residing in a California border town. This report is, however, the first stage in a multi-staged research program for discovering the social dimensions of language use within the Chicano speech community, and the first phase of a cumulative research strategy in Chicano sociolinguistics.

1.1 Some Preliminaries

A bilingual may be described, in general terms, as either a member of two distinct speech communities or as a member of a stable bilingual community, who alternates use of his two languages by appropriate social situations, or, as in most cases, mixes his two languages within a single utterance.[4] In 1959, Charles Ferguson introduced the term diglossia to refer to the use of two or more varieties of the same language by a speaker under different conditions. It was much later extended by Joshua Fishman (1965) to refer to the use of different languages for specific functions. For instance, Fishman (1968) suggests that for a stable bilingual group, one speech variety is often associated with status, high culture, and aspiration for upward social mobility (HIGH LANGUAGE), while the second speech variety corresponds to solidarity, comradeship, and intimacy (LOW LANGUAGE). In the Chicano's case,

Spanish may be seen as valuable in certain roles and English as valuable in others (Rubel,1968). For instance, following Barker's (1947) suggestion, bilingual Chicanos may thus distinguish between the use of Spanish and English - with Spanish being the language of intimacy and familial relations, and English being the language of formality and social mobility.

The central concern of this report is to present some findings that examine the association between the reported language use of bilingual Chicano adolescents for given social situations and their linguistic dominance. That is, this report examines the relative degree of diglossia for a small group of bilingual Chicano speakers.

1.2 The Participants and The Location

A total of 75 students, 33 males and 42 females, in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades participated in the study. The students were all residents of a California border town that borders a rather large metropolitan city in Mexico. The proximity is so close that it is not uncommon for residents to suggest that the California town is actually a suburb of the larger Mexican city.

The limitation of the study to a population of bilingual Chicano adolescents was initiated because of a basic desire to seek more information regarding the sociolinguistic situation of the bilingual Chicano adolescent[5]. Secondly, because the American social structure presents Chicano adolescents with limited means to acquire socially prescribed goals, a confusion of identity is created for the bilingual Chicano adolescent that all too often results in the adolescent giving up his Spanish mother tongue in order to have a better chance for success. And because adolescents tend to be more

responsive to peer group influence, they are also in a state where they are much more ready to identify with either American or Mexican subcultural values, and thus, with the usage of either the Spanish or English language.

The demographic data gathered indicates that the informants come from predominantly working class homes, with the parents employed as either laborers, service workers, or farm equipment operators. The educational level of the father, to the extent that the informants were able to furnish information, seems to hover about the sixth grade level, and for the mother, it seems to fall between the sixth and seventh grade level. The majority of the informants reported annual family income as being less than $5,000.

1.3 Data Collection Procedures

1.3.1 Language Dominance. To investigate the relationship between linguistic proficiency and language use, informants were administered the Bilingual Syntax Measure II (BSM II).[6] The BSM II is designed to measure the grammatical proficiency of junior high school to adult bilingual speakers in either or both languages by using natural speech as a basis for making judgements. It yields information on linguistic dominance and structural proficiency in English and/or Spanish.

1.3.2 Sociolinguistic Questionnaire. To investigate the language use of our bilingual informants within (a) the familial context, (b) given social situations; and (c) for frequency of use of Spanish-language mass media, a questionnaire type instrument, patterned after the instrument used by Rubin (1968) in her study of bilingualism in Paraguay, and the instrument used by Fishman, et. al. (1968) in their study of bilingualism among New York Puerto Ricans, was developed. However, our instrument differs from

these in the following two ways: (1) the social situations in the questionnaire designed to elicit language choice are much more specific and varied in order to reflect the informant's sphere of social involvement, and (2) items pertaining to language use are related to values dominant in the Chicano sociocultural system. The instrument was pilot-tested with a group of Chicano junior and senior high school students attending the Barrio Summer School Program sponsored by the Chicano Fellows Program at Stanford University. In sum, the instrument was revised and tested four times.

1.4 Discussion of Results

1.4.1 Dominance and Language Use. Results in Table 1 show that for each of the given social situations, linguistic dominance and reported use of language are closely associated. Comparison of the reported use of language for each of the situations by type of speaker shows that:

1. As expected, English Dominant (ED) speakers report using MOSTLY ENGLISH in all three situations, Balanced (B) speakers report using the SAME AMOUNT OF BOTH languages in all three situations, and Spanish Dominant (SD) speakers report using MOSTLY SPANISH in all three situations.

In addition, Table 2 and Table 3 show that there is a close association between informant's linguistic dominance and the language they reported as being most often used in their neighborhood and in their home. While these results are far from being conclusive, they are important because they provide us with some interesting information regarding what an individual can do (e.g. linguistic dominance) and what an individual actually does (e.g. reported language use). We may speculate, given these findings, that because of the close association present between linguistic dominance and language use self-reports have been demonstrated to be a useful method for

Table 1

Language Pattern Used In Different Social Situations by Type of Speaker

Language Pattern	With Friends in the School Hallway			On Your Neighborhood Sidewalk			In Your Neighborhood Sidewalk		
	(ED) (N=22)	(B) (N=23)	(SD) (N=30)	(ED) (N=22)	(B) (N=23)	(SD) (N=30)	(ED) (N=22)	(B) (N=23)	(SD) (N=30)
MOSTLY ENGLISH	78%	13%	3%	74%	4%	0	78%	4%	0
SAME AMOUNT OF BOTH	14%	65%	33%	18%	61%	3%	18%	61%	7%
MOSTLY SPANISH	8%	22%	64%	8%	35%	97%	4%	35%	93%
	X^2=196*, d.f.=4			X^2=289*, d.f.=4			X^2=292*, d.f.=4		

*significant at .05 level

Table 2

Language Spoken Most Often In Neighborhood
By Type Of Bilingual Speaker

Language Usage	Type of Speaker: English Dominant (N=22)	Balanced (N=23)	Spanish Dominant (N=30)
Mostly English	24%	8%	7%
Same Amount of Both	36%	31%	20%
Mostly Spanish	40%	61%	73%

Table 3

Language Spoken Most Often In The Home
By Type Of Bilingual Speaker

Language Usage	Type o. Speaker		
	English Dominant (N=22)	Balanced (N=23)	Spanish Dominant (N=30)
Mostly English	41%	0	0
Same Amount of Both	27%	13%	7%
Mostly Spanish	32%	87%	93%

collecting language use data.

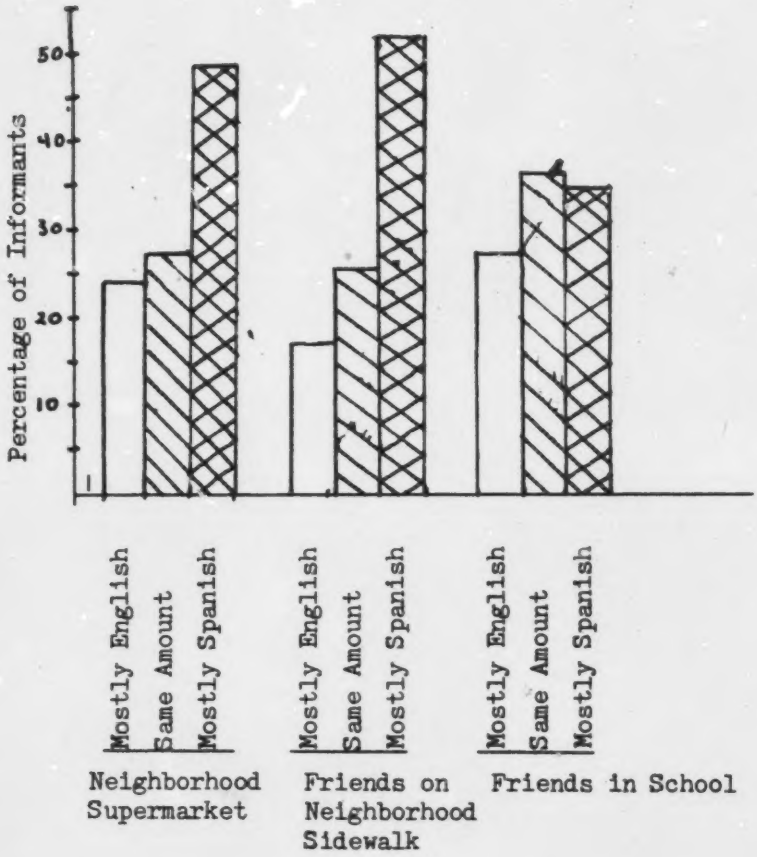
Thus, our finding that linguistic dominance and reported use of language are closely associated supports those of previous research in several respects. On the one hand, this finding supports the sociolinguistic proposition that language proficiency and language use are positively related (Cooper & Greenfield,1969; Edelman,1969), and suggests that knowledge of the bilingual speaker's grammatical control of his two languages may be used to predict his use and choice of language.

1.4.2 Language Use by Social Situation. Figure 1 shows that, relatively speaking, all respondents, regardless of linguistic dominance, reported using more English in the school hallway situation than in the two neighborhood situations. This finding provides some support for Rubin's (1968) assertion that among bilingual people, use of one language versus another is determined by the nature of the interaction situation. Interestingly enough, this finding is also in support of Fishman's (1965,1968) notion that domains are associated with certain language behaviors by bilingual people; and Patella & Kuvlesky's (1973) finding that use of Spanish decreases in situations successively further from the home, in our case, the neighborhood.

We may speculate that as the bilingual speaker increases his social interaction away from the family to peers or friends outside the neighborhood, the greater will be the speaker's probability of assimilating into the larger society, assuming English language use as an index of social assimilation. For Chicanos, the shift from the use of Spanish to the use of English may be fruitfully considered not only in terms of generational and

Figure 1

Informants' Reported Use of Language
For Three Given Social Situations



chronological changes in language use, but also in terms of a community milieu which may inhibit or enhance the possibilities of retaining Spanish or adding English. As Stanley Lieberson (1970) has demonstrated, there is good reason to expect language use to be influenced by the residential patterns of bilinguals.

1.4.3 The Familial Context. Informants were asked to list the members of their immediate household by age, sex, relationship, and the language used most often with each person for conversation in the home. Figure 2 summarizes our informants' use of language for the familial context.

Results from Figure 2 show that:

a. In order of decreasing frequency, Mostly Spanish is spoken with mother, father, younger sister, younger brother, older sister, older brother.

b. In order decreasing frequency, the same amount of English and Spanish is used most often with one's younger sister, with there not being any significant difference in its use with other family members.

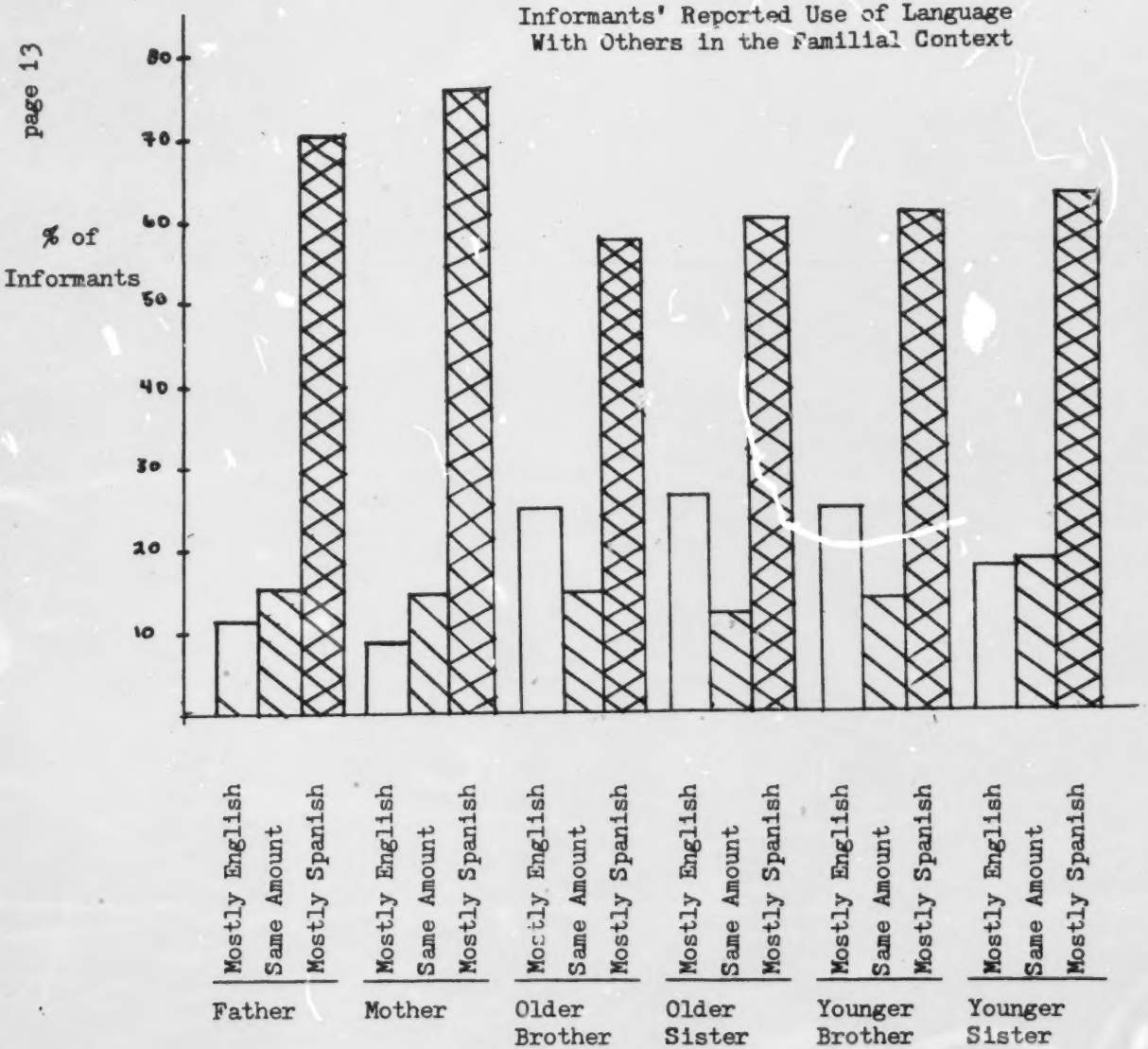
c. In order of decreasing frequency, Mostly English is spoken with older sister, older brother, younger brother, younger sister, father, and mother.

Interestingly enough, Figure 2 shows that Spanish is the language used most often by family members when speaking to each other, and, regardless of age, Spanish is the language used most often by siblings among themselves[7].

Given the rather limited scope of this study, future work would do well to compare the language use of each family member by age and sex. In this manner, cross-sex and cross-age comparisons may enable us to better evaluate language choice by topic, or by social occasion, within the familial context. Given this, we may be able to get closer toward understanding

Figure 2

Informants' Reported Use of Language With Others in the Familial Context



why different family members make different choices between the two languages.

1.4.4 Mass Media Use. Table 4 summarizes informants' reported use of Spanish language mass media. In order of decreasing use, we can see that informants rated the various types of media follows: radio programs (69%), television programs (65%), newspapers or magazines (64%), books (45%), and movies (41%).

As we can see, informants are frequent users of Spanish language mass media. The proximity of Mexico might be a factor accounting for this result. However, regardless of whether this is the case, we can speculate that use of Spanish language mass media is helping maintain the use of Spanish within the Chicano speech community, and among our bilingual Chicano adolescents. The issue becomes problematic though if we begin to consider whether the use of Spanish language mass media is either a good indicator for the maintenance of the Spanish language or a good indicator of loyalty toward the Spanish language. The former concern would imply that Spanish was spoken by Chicanos, whereas the latter would imply that Spanish is simply the preferred medium of communication, regardless of whether it is used or not[8].

1.5 Summary and Concluding Remarks

Given the rather limited scope of this study we may conclude that maintenance of and loyalty to the Spanish language is very high for the bilingual Chicano adolescents participating in this study. Specifically, we have seen: (1) that linguistic dominance and language use are closely associated, (2) a rather high level of Spanish language use in the familial context, and (3) a widespread use of Spanish language mass media. Whether the proximity of Mexico is a primary reason for the existence of this

Table 4

Informants' Reported Use of Spanish Language Mass Media

Frequency of Use	Radio Programs	Newspapers or Magazines	Books	Television Programs	Movies
Once a Week or More	69%	64%	45%	65	41%
Once or Twice a Month	7%	12%	16%	8%	13%
Once every three or four months	3%	7%	11%	11%	12%
Once a Year	0	17%	7%	4%	7%
Not At All	21%	16%	21%	12%	27%

sociolinguistic situation is something that cannot be answered by this study. However, we can infer that it does play an undertermined, but significant, role in shaping the Chicano adolescents' sociclinguistic situation.

Work which seeks to examine the sociolinguistic situation of the Chicano bilingual adolescent must be cautious in interpreting a measure of the bilingual speaker's linguistic dominance as an indicator of social assimilation, and consequently, of language loss (e.g. loss of the ability to speak one's mother tongue). For while linguistic dominance and language use may be closely associated, as our results show, dominance alone does not serve to define its relationship to language loss, but may simply serve to identify it. If Fishman's (1966) suggestion is plausible that with the acquisition and development of a second language a person often adopts some of the values associated with that language, then we must be able to identify the relationship of these values to the speaker's development of a social commitment to the second language. In this manner, we may be in a better position to examine the various social mechanics involved in language loss. For instance, is language loss the result of adopting the values of a second language and identifying with them? or, is language loss a necessary condition for the adoption of values belonging to a second language?

Thus, in order for the relationship between linguistic dominance and language use to be part of an explanatory framework for the association between language loss and social assimilation, future research must consider, in detail, the contextual nature of bilingualism. That is, the (a) effects of residential patterns and location, (b) degree of bilingualism in the

neighborhood, (c) general attitudes toward bilingualism, and (d) language use in general, upon the bilingual Chicano adolescent's use and choice of language must be outlined in order to observe how this speaker is socialized to develop a social commitment for one language, but not another. For it is among Chicano adolescents that we are going to find a polarization into at least two types of speakers: those who adopt and follow the dominant elements of middle-class America, and those who rebel linguistically and socially (c.f. Lance,1969). For comparative purposes, more research is needed to determine to what extent this is a general tendency among Chicanos and in other populations where bilingualism is a predominant behavioral pattern. These are all researchable issues that must be addressed by further research before we can begin to assert generally valid conclusions regarding the sociolinguistic situation of the bilingual Chicano adolescent.

Footnotes

1. For a review and evaluation of the field, see: Aguirre,1977a,1977b.

2. In particular, see: Espinosa,1917,1946.

3. See the following sources: Grebler, et. al.(1970), Skrabanek (1970), Dunn (1975), Patella & Kuvlesky (1973).

4. One can also think of a bilingual in Weinreich's (1953) sense of an individual who makes regular use of his two languages. Similarly, Haugen (1956) views bilinguals as individuals with the ability to produce some complete and meaningful utterances in a second language. As a comparison with these two views, Bloomfield (1933) described a bilingual as someone with native-like control of a second language. In our case, our view of bilingualism is close to the popular notion of regarding individuals with an equal proficiency in two languages as being bilingual.

5. Most research on the Chicano adolescent has been limited to an analysis of their psychological adjustment to a dual marginal role, and very little, if any, work has been done examining his language use. For examples of the former type of work see: Derbyshire (1968), and Peak (1958).

6. The BSM II is an instrument currently being field tested by M. Burt, H. Dulay, and E. Hernandez-Chavez. For a detailed description of the instrument, see: Aguirre (1977c).

7. Another study which examines language use in a Chicano household is the one by Timm (1975).

8. A paper which examines the role of Spanish-language mass media in maintaining the Spanish language in the Chicano speech community is the one by Aguirre & Gutierrez (1978).

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